2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

their village life, and, as in most other Bantu societies, the common, and sometimes the essential way of fulfilling social obligations. Beer is the present of honour between kinsmen. It is carried to chiefs as tribute, used to reward labour, or given as an offering to spirits. Nowadays, it may be one of the few ways by which a woman, left deserted by her husband, can make money for clothes.[1] Men cultivate extra ground in order to have enough millet for brewing. Abundance of beer is the glory of a commoner's hospitality, or a chief's court. Without it tribal councils cannot be held, and marriage or initiation ceremonies do not take place. For all these reasons it is impossible to describe the physical effects of native beer-drinking without knowing the part it plays in the Bemba's whole social life. *Ubwalua* is served in big calabashes holding about 2 or 3 gallons, or in disused petrol tins. It consists of a thick brown sludge to which hot water is added constantly throughout the evening so that the brew gets gradually weaker and weaker.[2] It is drunk through a hollow reed two or three gulps at a time. It is a cloudy fluid, often full of gritty particles, with a clear sharp taste not unlike the bitter flavour of English beer. Most natives become positively lyrical as to its qualities. They say it makes them rejoice (*ukusansamuka*) and that it warms their hearts (*ukukafyo mutima*)—the ordinary phrase used for getting excited and also angry. Old councillors at the chief's court who have become used to a regular supply of beer, complain bitterly if they are deprived of it. They say that it is bad for them to eat 'cold food', i.e. ordinary meals, and that they need something to 'burn their stomachs just there' (with a hand laid on the spot), and in fact beer must be much easier to digest in old age than most other Bemba foods.

Beer is recognized as making a man more talkative, liable to quarrel, or indulge in illicit love-making, and men whose hearts get hot quickly, to repeat the native phrase, are avoided at beer-drinks, if possible, because they may involve their friends in legal liabilities. I have even heard of cases where Bemba refused to marry into families with a reputation for becoming excitable when drunk. But drunkenness itself is not despised. In fact the drunkard

[1] The sale of beer is illegal in this district, but it is practically impossible to prevent the trading of small quantities.

[2] In samples taken at the beginning and at the end of an evening respectively, Dr. Widdowson found that the alcohol content varied from 4·44 per cent. to 2·10 per cent. (I am indebted to Mr. Douglas Miller of the Education Department for dispatching these samples.)

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

273 is regarded with a kind of laughing tolerance or envy and, as
733 will be seen, the tribal drinking customs make it impossible for any one except a chief to become a regular drunkard. A commoner may brew beer more often than his fellows, or feel its effect quicker, but it is difficult for him actually to get much more to drink than they do. In any case, the drunkard is regarded generally as an irresponsible individual, and of anybody who commits adultery or assault when under the influence of drink, the phrase 'an affair of beer' (*umulandu ua bwalua*) is used quite tolerantly.

273 Some of the deleterious effects of alcohol are recognized. I never heard any complaints or jokes about double vision made, but have several times seen natives refuse to go out tree-cutting the morning after a beer-drink because of 'beer before the eyes' (*ubwalua pa menso*), meaning, I think, fear of giddiness or lack of co-ordination. Headaches are quite common the day after a big beer party. To the European, the remarkable thing about native drinking is the speed with which the people seem to get excited and garrulous. The percentage of alcohol is probably rarely more than 4 per cent., and many of the company get very little to drink during an evening. But it must be remembered that the *ubwalua* is drunk hot which may increase its potency, and also that it is drunk very much less regularly than in this country. The Paramount Chief
643 told me that a great ruler should drink beer every day without
273 exception. Otherwise, if he drank only once or twice a week, he would become drunk like a commoner and stagger about and give bad judgements in court. 'His chieftainship would suffer' (*ukuti bufumu buonaule*). This was obviously in the nature of a 'rationalization', but it is true that chiefs who drink regularly seem to get bemused, but never violently drunk as commoners occasionally do.

273 But it is probably the fact that beer-drinking is such a social
574 event that accounts for the people's quick sense of exhilaration and even intoxication. Natives gather together from surrounding
[521] villages to drink at their relatives' huts and exchange gossip, and this is in itself an interesting occasion in a society in which the local group is so small. Further, beer is drunk by the maximum number of people who can crowd into one hut. At an average brewing three or four calabashes might be available for distribution, and of these one would be given to the headman to share with the elders of the village, another might be given to the son-in-law of the brewer to drink with the younger men of the village, and a

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

third kept in the owner's hut for his near family or special friends. But in each case, after the formal drinking has begun, the original guests are joined by others who enter with a polite salutation, take a short pull at the beer, and stay for a short talk. When there is only one calabash to be divided in the village, each inhabitant will probably join the crowd in the hut at one time or another in the evening. Thus there is a constant coming and going of men and women, and the children who are too small to be left at home. Dancing nearly always accompanies the drinking. In these circumstances it is not surprising that there should be the maximum amount of excitement with the minimum of alcohol consumed. Old women usually drink with the men. It is considered bad form for young girls to do so, and women nursing small children are afraid to join in for fear that the baby might be harmed by contact with a hearth touched by some one ritually impure during the confusion of the evening's drink. Where there is enough beer therefore the women have a calabash of their own.

The guests come together in a condition of pleasurable anticipation. They crowd into a hut about eight feet in diameter and sit huddled on the floor side by side in the closest possible physical contact. The heat is terrific, as the fire is piled high to keep the water boiling and to give light to the company. Sweat pours down naked shoulders. Sometimes singing begins, and the whole company rock to and fro clapping their hands, or they may be wedged still tighter against the wall, and a space cleared for a solo dancer and a couple of big drums. The watchers sway, tap with their feet, and clap the rhythm. At other times the drums stand outside in the village square, and young men and women stream out of the hut to line up for the big round dance—*icila*, or the line dance—the *ngwai*. In these conditions the excitement of social intercourse is probably at least as potent as the influence of alcohol.[1] Real drunkenness, in the form in which we know it, is more often to be found in the modern villages where a man can 'drink alone', or with a few friends and when dancing does not accompany the drinking.

It is difficult to estimate the quantity of beer drunk by the Bemba during a year or an average night. In the harvest months—May to

[1] A compound-manager at Wankie Mine told me that he had found the same amount of intoxication produced among the mine employees at a Christmas beer-drink with an alcohol content of about half that which was usual. He explained it by saying, 'I think they had been expecting to get drunk at Christmas for so long.'